

Saving Pirates – an Opportunity

It would appear that the fire of the Australian Pirate Party needs reigniting. The following is only a personal account and may not be based on the complete picture. That being said, I hope there is something useful here for turning the Pirate Party into a force to be reckoned with in Australian politics.

I thank National Council member Fred Gerner for referring me to Rick Falkvinge's "Swarmwise" (Falkvinge R. (2013). *Swarmwise*. CreateSpace Publishing Platform. <https://falkvinge.net/books/>), which I read and found to be mind-opening and inspirational. Falkvinge is the original modern Pirate, the founder of the Swedish Pirate Party and Godfather of the worldwide Pirate Party political movement. *Swarmwise* is Falkvinge's book documenting the swarm method of growing and running the original Pirate Party and how it has been used to spread into other geographies. While I don't believe the Australian environment is quite right for a full-blown swarm, I do think there are many ideas that can be lifted from this work.

But first, a little bit about me

I joined as a member and voted for the Pirate Party in 2019 - admittedly not long ago. I'm not ashamed to say I've loved pirates since I was a kid and the name certainly caught the attention of my inner child. Upon looking into the policies, I was more-so-than-not aligned with the thinking. Personal liberty and responsibility, minimalist government, free markets and social goods, advocacy of privacy, digital rights and copyright reforms. As a user of technology, I appreciated a Party that had these at the forefront of its vision for the future of Australia.

However, in my time as a member I was unaware of any significant activity within the Party. I received no communications; I wasn't aware of any events and let my membership slip after the first year. I only renewed again when I happened to check the Discord server and found that Pirates had deregistered as a political party due to lack of numbers.

At day, I am a Digital Project/Delivery Manager for a global consultancy firm with a background in Business Analysis. I am a fairly considered and analytical person - the type that Rick Falkvinge warns about coming in to the swarm and suggesting it would be better if it was run "my way". Well, hopefully I'm not exactly like that.

Following are some thoughts I have put together on where I see the Party could make improvements. I'm not saying that I want or would be able to step in and save the Party. Just me suggesting it needs saving is probably going to get a few backs up. But I've listed out some observations and suggestions, should the Party choose to consider them now or in the future and hope to be part of implementing some. I hope this will trigger further discussion and activism.

Just a few thoughts

Have a Plan (part 1)

With such a range of policies covering many political topics, developing a roadmap would demonstrate forward thinking. What topics are Pirates campaigning on? If Pirates were in power tomorrow, what would it be putting in to action first? For policies that aren't over-night fixes, what is the implementation plan over time? This will help to focus effort and marketing on a few key policies rather than spreading over everything. Particularly while the Party is currently relatively small.

At minimum, the Party should organise policies into tiers, Core, Major and Minor. Core policies are those that make up the backbone of the Party and also encapsulate the principles that the rest of the Policies should be derived. These are policies relating to freedom of information and culture, civil and digital liberties, privacy and anonymity, government transparency and participatory democracy.

Major policies should be a select handful of significant and timely policies that the Party identifies as having a significantly strong and perhaps unique perspective. These policies may or may not be the same as the Party's core. Major policies speak to majority of the public on matters that might be contentious within the current political environment, or could cause disruption. Economic and environment policies for example are not necessarily "core" Pirate policies, but the Party has and should continue to develop alternative approaches to these major issues. The Party should build an election strategy around 2-3 policies from the core and major policy list to build a strong and targeted campaign.

Minor policies, are the remainder. These should certainly not be ignored, but they do not play as significant role in promoting the belief system of the Party. The exception being if there is significant public interest in a topic at a particular time.

Engage the membership

The Party needs to do a better job at keeping the membership interested and engaged in what the Party is doing. One of the foundational/core precepts of the Pirate Party is based on participation.

By allowing members to optionally subscribe to newsletter mail outs and text/phone calls, the Party will build momentum quicker. I think there are some mailing lists but I'm pretty sure they don't work. Ask members to participate in local hang outs, brain storming and educational sessions, social events, take surveys and vote on minor ongoing Party related content. Build a culture of engagement that will keep members renewing and spreading the word.

Local Chapters

While this might be hard to do with an initial small member base, enabling semi-independent functional groups will be key to enabling growth of the Party. Perhaps not so much as a single swarm, but as many interconnected nodes. The concept of State Branches is already outlined in the Party Constitution and should be used by the Party, not only for election campaigns but for general decentralisation of the Party structure.

Groups would be split geographically, at first by State and then as the group grows, broken up by Region, City, Council area, and down to the Suburb if the groups grow large enough. Breaking out by electorate may also have benefits for developing teams in preparation for election campaigns in that area.

There should be nothing stopping the Party from continuing to interact at the National level or from people visiting different Chapters, but with local focus groups, the Party can aim to establish more activities that will hopefully attract members to join and participate.

Each Chapter should have its own leadership group that can bridge the communication between National Council and the members in each area. The numbers and sizes for groups is well laid out in Swarmwise.

Young Pirates

There is little doubt that the youth have more energy and less baggage. Generally speaking, we are the most creative and open-minded the younger we are and therefore promoting the Pirates to the younger generation now is paramount. These are the people most likely to vote outside of the two major parties and are also most affected by actions of our governments now, as they will have to deal with the consequences in the future.

Encourage activism and also educate on how they can be a part of the future of change as part of the Pirate Party. Marching in streets is fine, developing kickass policies and beating the politicians at their own game is better.

Start Fights

What kind of Pirates don't start fights? The members of the Party are passionate about numerous topics and policies. Many topics are disputed internally on the Discord server - why not bring these to the world? Actively seek out policy and political opinion that doesn't match the Party's principles, and ~~attack~~ discuss it. Participate in healthy debate with other political parties who have opposing views on a particular topic.

Of course, this should be done with a degree of respect, focusing on the view of the Party rather than personal take-down tactics. Memes are a great way to convey these messages and is already a significant part of the Pirate culture, albeit probably under-utilised. Targeted use of humorous and accurate memes are also an effective way to communicate with younger generations.

Be Seen

A physical appearance will give the Party some credibility. The Pirate Party should be making sure that State leaders are seen on News to respond to political events. Offer interviews and comments - don't wait for them to come to the Party.

"Merchandising! Merchandising! Where the real money from the movie is made." (Yogurt, Spaceballs 1988) Shirts, hats, flags and stickers are easy ways to start to get the Pirate Party name seen in public and also a way to fund raise at the same time. The Party needs merch and the website needs a store. Offer merch as add-ons to membership signups and National Congress tickets. Additionally, make design files free for download with instructions on how members can produce their own gear.

Seeing the name and slogan may spark a conversation with a stranger or prompt someone to look up the website for more information. It's free advertising!

Engage Experts

As the Party grows, the membership is likely to include many subject matter experts across a range of political subjects. Until then, the Party should be relying on third party experts. The Party already has an internal policy of referencing material as the basis for its argument, so the Party should also be referencing third party content in discourse. Interviews, printed and filmed, gathering the information needed to build solid and effective policy and conversations about things that matter to every day Australians. This should be especially the case for core and major policies and topics, where additional credibility can be built by having unaffiliated experts contribute to the Pirate narrative.

There have been some attempts at this already and should be fostered as a focus area to encourage engagement from outside of the Party.

Have a Plan (part 2)

Now a bit more of the Project Managery stuff. At least until there is enough motivation to self-organise, the members of the Party needs to know what their role is in the operations of the Party. What are the things that need to get done and who is doing them? Similar to the Swarm concept where anyone can contribute, but with a little more structure, the Party should publish an ongoing backlog of activities the Party needs to have happen and track the progress.

It doesn't have to be super rigid, although some items will end up with due dates and they might need to be delegated if no-one volunteers. There should be activities happening all year around - not just around election time.

Conclusion and Call To Action

What I have laid out here is not revolutionary nor complete. They are small, but significant pieces of organisational function and can be implemented by anyone. This isn't about changing the policies or principles of the Pirates, rather about an opportunity to make the Pirate platform easier to consume and engage with by members and public alike, giving focus to the message.

I believe the Pirate Party holds a unique line in Australian politics with such diverse voices and opinions. That is our strength, and the Australian people deserve to hear what Pirates have to say!